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ABSTRACT

One of the ideas frequently offered for the improvement of American education, privatization, has the advantage of conforming to the popular beliefs that markets produce better results than do government entities. This popular support has been a major reason for the willingness of local officials to consider changes that dismantle or supersede public education structures. This book uses five critical issues as lenses to examine experiments in privatization: (1) student outcomes; (2) costs; (3) parental voice; (4) accountability; and (5) equity. The first two chapters review the major issues in privatization and how advocates have argued for the benefits of privatization in each of these five areas. Chapter 3 describes two privatization experiments funded by the Federal government in the 1970s, one in performance contracting and one with vouchers. Chapter 4 analyzes the privatization efforts in Baltimore (Maryland), and chapter 5 reviews other privatization efforts in Boston (Massachusetts), Chicago (Illinois), Hartford (Connecticut), and Milwaukee (Wisconsin). Chapter 6 describes some other types of current reform that affect the five critical areas, and the final chapter summarizes evidence on school privatization. It is argued that privatization is not a cure for the ills of the nation's urban schools, and that it may lead to the development of a dual system of educational opportunity. (SLD)

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